
Interviews
with
MISS
BROWN



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Fellowship in Prayer was founded in 1949 by Carl Allison Evans. When he died in 1956, leadership fell to his associate, Miss Kathryn G. Brown, who first became acting Executive Secretary, then Executive Secretary, and currently President of the Board of Trustees. Miss Brown retired in 1977, moved out of her beloved New York City, and went to live next door to her sister Norma in the retirement community of Crestwood, New Jersey. She occupies a small house filled with mementoes of the Fellowship—Mr. Evans's collection of handcarved elephants, fine old china, a pair of Chinese lanterns, Chinese rugs, paintings, scrolls, and photographs, and the VariTyper on which the bi-monthly publication was set for years. As active in retirement as before, Miss Brown gardens and likes nothing better than to cook huge dinners for friends. When we asked her to let us interview her about her life with Fellowship in Prayer, she provided six days in September of 1980 to sit with us and our tape-recorder and photographer. From these conversations we have selected the contents of this special issue.

Interviews by Paul Griffith and Bob Waite *Photographs by Tom Dunham*

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Miss Brown: When I decided to leave the United Board for Christian Colleges in China to help Mr. Evans with Fellowship in Prayer, I handed in my resignation. Tears came to Mr. Seaman's eyes and he said: "Miss Brown, I was depending on you so much." He was a fine man. I never felt so sorry for a man in my whole life. "Well, Mr. Seaman," I said, "I think it's better this way." So that was that. Once I make up my mind and see my way through, there's no turning back. I never turn back.

When Mr. Evans left the United Board, he went to see people and formed the committee that was the beginning of the Fellowship—Dr. Hung, Mrs. Taylor, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop Yu Ping. They persuaded Mr. Evans to go ahead with his idea. So he took his pension and I took the insurance I had gotten on my resignation from the Board—it was around three thousand dollars—and we put the ad in *The New York Times* on December 12, 1949, answering the ad run by Mr. Ferris Booth—"God and the Atom."* And that was the beginning of the Fellowship. We didn't have much to begin with—a little office with no air, no windows. We had an old mimeograph machine and Mr. Evans had a printing press on which we set up the letterhead. But that didn't stop us. And after we ran the ad, Harry Halsey Starrett got in touch with us and Mary Hornaday of *The Christian Science Monitor* came and did a story about the Fellowship and the Senator from Colorado read the story into *The Congressional Record.*

FIP: Where did Mr. Evans get his idea for an all-faith prayer fellowship?

Miss Brown: From his time as a missionary in the Philippines, where he'd seen missionaries who should have known better quarrel over little things that didn't have anything to do with religion. Mr. Evans thought it was awful. What about countries, then? Hostilities are so unnecessary. He said people should know better, and the individual heart must be changed to bring about peace in the world. That's what gave him the idea of prayer. Prayer is the heart of all religions believing in a supreme being.

FIP: What was Mr. Evans like?

Miss Brown: He was the most humble Christian man who ever walked the face of the earth. He was always doing things for other people, taking very little credit for himself—very little. When he retired from the United Board, they wrote that he was "surely one of those modest men who has served untiringly head, heart, and hand for the advancement of God's Kingdom."

*Note: the ad in the *Times* was headlined "Prayer is the answer . . . it is attainable . . . how?" and was signed "Fellowship in Prayer, 22 E. 29 Street, New York 16, N.Y."



After the ad appeared, I told Mr. Evans I thought he needed somebody with independent funds to help him. I myself couldn't live in New York without getting a salary. I said, "Mr. Evans, it's too bad we have to have money, but we have to have money in order to live." I thought he should find someone else. I also didn't want to get involved in the bookeeping of the Fellowship, which had to be done the same as if you were running a small business. I hate bookeeping! But Mr. Evans said, "I don't know anyone with your innate qualities, Miss Brown, who is better able to carry on the work. I'm not doing this without you." So he paid me a salary just so that I could get on.

My one ambition was to do something worthwhile, to be creative. I am sort of a creative person. Ideas come to me. Many ideas came to me after prayer—some I could carry out, some I couldn't. But I did what I could. When things opened up, I would follow through. My education was not too much—I mean, as far as college goes. That's what I've always said to Dr. Hung *(President Emeritus of Fellowship in Prayer)*: "Here I am working with all college graduates!" And he would say, "Forget about them, Miss Brown. Prayer is all you need."

It was never my wish to get a big salary. Money was secondary with me, never number one. Number one was to do something that would be helpful to the world or to other people. Believe me, when I was in the office I did plenty of work. I never had thoughts of a return for myself. Never. You must never have money in mind. I feel if you do your work and do it well, the money will come.

And it's amazing—that year, things opened up just like a door. If I had turned my back on it, I'm sure something would have happened to me. I couldn't think of the money part and forget all those people. That's what Mr. Evans said: "How can I forget all those people?"

FIP: When and how did the first bi-monthly get published?

Miss Brown: In 1950. Mr. Evans never meant to have a publication. He sent out reports to people who had contributed to tell them what we were doing with the money. These reports eventually became the publication. I did it on the portable typewriter, then we mimeographed it, and sent it out.

Mr. Evans and I did the whole thing in the office. Stapled it. We bought some covers, like you use for a church bulletin. Some of them looked pretty bad. But Mr. Evans didn't ever want to have a "slick publication" like the *Reader's Digest* and all the rest. He figured out the size, which was one you could put in your pocket and carry easily. He wanted it to be unique.

A lot of people were really interested in the work. *Sunshine* magazine cooperated. They published an article about Mr. Evans. So did *Guideposts*. And others.



FIP: In addition to the publication, what other kind of work was being done by the Fellowship?

Miss Brown: One of Mr. Evans's plans was to put ads—like the one that had come out in the *Times*—in different papers across the country. He thought there would be a kind of chain-reaction.

There were also the annual reports to put out. The reports were sent out to all the trustees and all the contributors—like Mrs. Lilly and others. Mrs. Lilly'd look forward to getting it.

I don't remember quite how she came to the Fellowship. She had been a contributor to the United Board, and Mr. Evans knew her. One year Helen Dudley Young did a very nice Christmas card for us, and, as I recall, Mrs. Lilly ordered a large number of them—around five-hundred, I think—and she payed a good sum for them. And from then on she became interested and gave so much each year.

Later she told me that Mr. Evans's name—Carl Allison Evans—had caught her eye right away. Because her maiden name was Ruth Allison. She was wondering if, further back, they weren't related.

She never met Mr. Evans, I think. But, you know, if you correspond with someone for a number of years, you know them better than if you meet them once or twice. And Mr. Evans wrote very nice letters. That was how she and I got to know each other, too. And when I met her she was so gracious and thereafter she became more friendly. She'd write me personal letters and tell me all about the family.

I didn't meet her until the middle of the 'sixties—1965 or 64. That year Dr. Hung and I went on a speaking trip to California. Zelma Dennis, our Advisor there, had it well organized. Both Dr. Hung and I spoke. While we were there, Helen Young brought Mr. Evans's portrait—the famous drawing, the one in the office. When we left California, we took the portrait with us. We stopped off in Chicago, where our great friend Anna Grace Sawyer had arranged for Dr. Hung to speak to the Greater Chicago Federation of Churches. Then, the next day, we flew from Chicago to Indianapolis.

Mrs. Lilly met us at the airport. In the plane as it was landing, I said to Dr. Hung, "How is Mrs. Lilly going to recognize us?" He said, "Don't worry about that. There are not many young ladies traveling with a Chinese professor." And she was right there at the gate. When we got to the Lillys' home, Mrs. Lilly said we could take our choice of rooms. I had a great big room and bath, and so did Dr. Hung. We rested a while, then later on there was a big dinner-party—the most beautiful table I've ever seen. We had a lovely dinner, a lot of talk going on. Mr. Williams was there, of Lilly Endowment. He was head of the religious department. After dinner, nothing would do but that we open up Mr. Evans's portrait so that the Lillys could see it. They thought it was beautiful. Next morning, the portrait had to be rewrapped, and Dr. Hung and Mr. Lilly got down on their knees on the floor and did it



up themselves. It was a very touching moment. Afterwards, Dr. Hung set it up on the settee. "Dr. Hung," I said, "maybe you shouldn't set it there. It might damage the brocade." Whereupon Mrs. Lilly said, "Oh no, that all right. If it gets damaged, it will be an antique!" This is an indication of the type of woman she was.

During the dinner-party at the Lillys', incidentally, Dr. Hung said to Mr. Williams, "Don't you think Mrs. Lilly and Miss Brown resemble each other?"

I said, "That's a compliment to me, Dr. Hung, but I don't know about Mrs. Lilly."

But they actually did think so. Although Mrs. Lilly was an older woman, she was well-preserved. She did not have gray hair.

FIP: You met a great many very interesting people through the Fellowship. Whom do you remember?

Miss Brown: Well, there were the Luces. Henry W., the father, was a missionary. He was one of the nicest men I ever met. Henry R. was the *Time-Life* man. Mr. Evans didn't want him to get interested in the Fellowship. Mr. Evans knew him very well—he was chairman of one of the boards for the United Board. Mr. Evans felt that Henry R. would take over the Fellowship and make it something that Mr. Evans did not intend to have. Mr. Evans didn't want big people like that to dominate the Fellowship. He wanted to start from the bottom up, build a firm foundation, and not have it snowball. He said it wouldn't mean anything then, and it wouldn't be lasting.

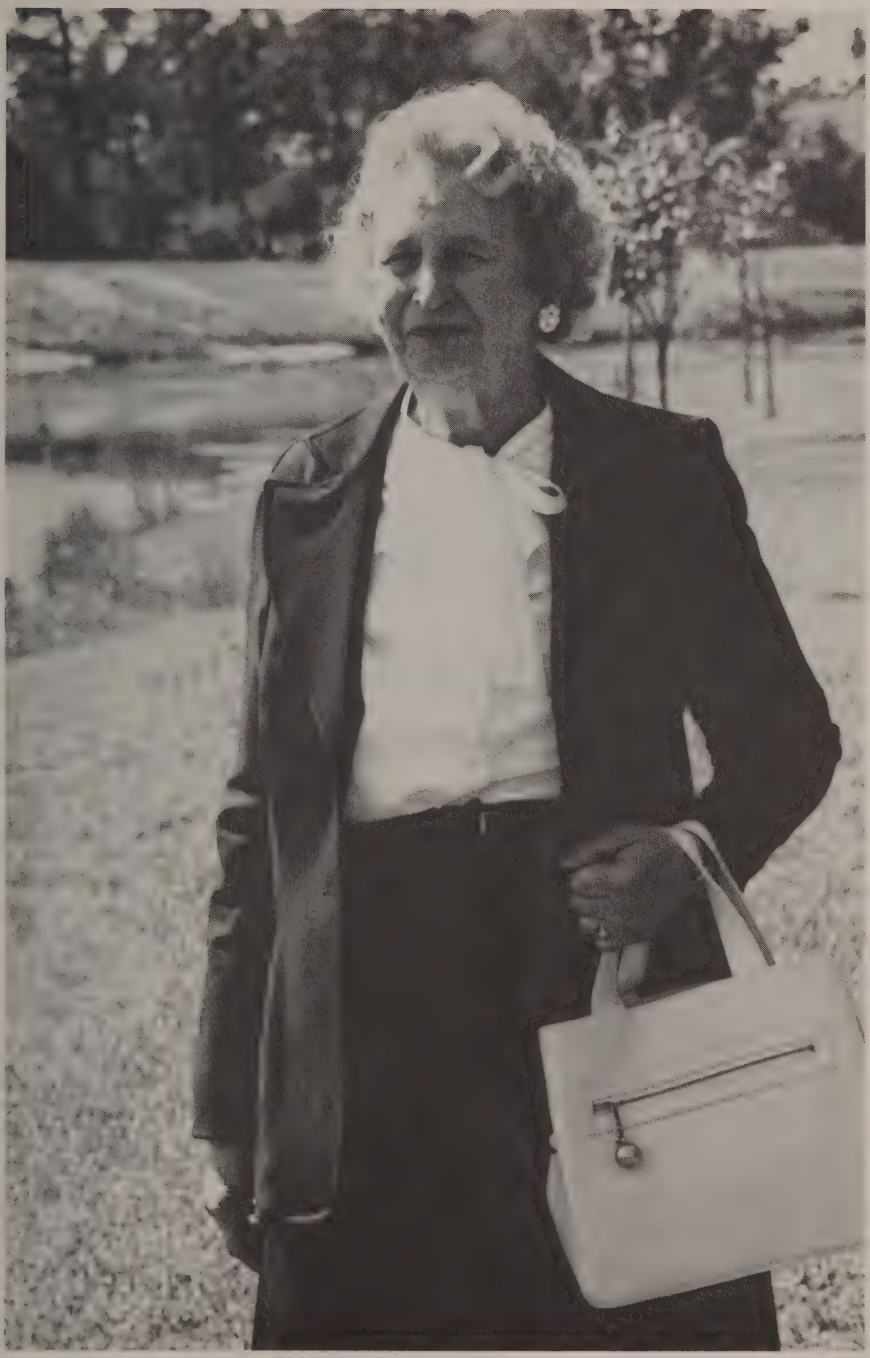
But the large majority of contacts I had with people was through letters.

FIP: You conducted most of the Fellowship's business by letter?

Miss Brown: Yes. That's why I could do my best work at night. Because you've got to be inspired to write a letter. It's nothing to write a business letter so long as you know your subject. But to write our type of letter is entirely different, and I had to learn.

When somebody got me annoyed, I would never reply to them right away. Never. Nor did I get angry. I never put myself on their level. I got a letter, for instance, from a well-known minister in a large Presbyterian church who wrote criticizing me for the work I was doing. He thought I shouldn't be interfaith but totally Christian. Well, I wrote him a letter. And I got not one letter of apology back but three. "Of course, Miss Brown," he said, "I was wrong." And he explained why he was wrong.

I would always write as well as I could. I would be gracious but stick to the truth. Don't tell anything which is not the truth. Don't be dishonest in any way. That is one thing I will not stand for. Anything









that is right I will stand up for, anything that is not right I will not support. What's right is right.

FIP: Who were some of the other interesting people involved in the Fellowship?

Miss Brown: In 1953 the Seekers and Harmony Prayer Circle in England became interested in our work. Mr. Evans said being linked with them is a powerful help to the Fellowship. (*Note: Fellowship in Prayer continues the practice, established then, of joining the Seekers in prayer at a designated hour each week.*)

Another very interesting person was Mrs. Rideout—Frances Rideout. One day, when she was visiting her daughter in Indianapolis, she heard a knock at the door and there was the *Times* for the day and in it was our ad. She read it through and right there and then realized it was the idea she happened to be looking for, for a speech she had to make. She contacted us and started the ball rolling in California. California was our largest state for members and contributors. At the time we had a big map in the office. We would put pins in the map where the Fellowship was reaching. Thanks to Mrs. Rideout, there were always the most pins out in California.

Mrs. Rideout, you might be interested to know, was the one who suggested our using Durer's "Praying Hands." Mrs. Rideout did a whale of a job. But one morning they found her lying on the dining-room floor, dead. She was a beautiful woman who worked hard for the betterment of mankind.

Rhoda Hung did a magnificent piece of work in the Boston area.

Dr. W. J. Thompson was a great help. He was a renowned minister.

Gordon Belding and Frank Mastropaolo both rendered outstanding services to Fellowship in Prayer and me.

And A. E. Johnson. He wrote a verse that appeared in the *Times,* entitled "Serendipity," and Mr. Evans read it and was so impressed by it he got in touch with Professor Johnson, who was head of the drama department at Syracuse University. He contributed many poems to the publication and eventually became a trustee.

Anna Grace Sawyer was another interesting person. She was a wealthy florist—an elderly woman. She knew Mr. Evans. She helped him finance the Fellowship. She did a great deal for it, getting it into churches in Forest Park, Oak Park, and Chicago. It was she who had me speak in Chicago.

When I left Chicago, I flew down to Lima, Ohio, to meet Mr. Starrett. Mr. Evans had wanted to meet him, so I went down to Lima to, so to speak, fulfill his desire. I became deathly sick on the plane, but when we got there, Mr. Starrett had a beautiful room for me in the hotel. On the dresser was a gorgeous orchid and a great big bouquet of

flowers. Karl Frey, a Fellowship Advisor, sent them. And the Felgers drove through the snow from Fort Wayne. Next morning, the editor of the paper came, and the photographer took pictures of Mr. Starrett and me. They had set up a TV appearance for me, too. I was very nervous about it, so nervous that I tried to stand up with all that wiring on me. But Mr. Starrett said I did well, he was very pleased. There are many others. And our Advisors and Trustees, of course.

FIP: People have said that Mr. Evans's genius lay in his idea of groups in prayer together—that that was something new.

Miss Brown: That's true. Mr. Evans felt it was the personal touch that would advance the Fellowship. He was an amazing person. All the Chinese loved him. Everybody did. He was so plain, he could fit into any situation. It didn't matter if people had money or were very poor, he would fit in.

FIP: Mr. Evans had bad health in the last years, didn't he?

Miss Brown: In 1953, my sister Helen had to have an operation, so I took my vacation to take care of her two children, who were small then. She wouldn't trust anyone else. The first morning I was there, Mrs. Evans called me. She was so upset she was almost in tears. She said Mr. Evans was in the White Plains hospital—they'd taken him right from the train, and he was operated on for gall stones at eight o'clock that night. Mr. Evans had a congested heart. Mrs. Evans said he was very bad, in an oxygen tent. I said I would try to get my mother to stay with the children and I'd go right down to the office in New York. Which I did. My uncle drove me to the station. Then on Thursday Mrs. Evans wanted me to go up to Scarsdale. She said no one could see Mr. Evans, but thought I could for just a moment. So I went. He was happy to see me. He was confined for two months. I went up to see him twice a week. Later, when he got over that operation, he had to have a prostate operation, too. He pulled through in spite of his heart-condition. When he came back to the office, though, he couldn't do too much. Then—in 1954—Mrs. Evans passed away, and I went up and helped him with the funeral, got all the clothes for the undertaker. I found the green satin dress which I had purchased for her in New York, and gave her an orchid. She looked beautiful. Mr. Evans remarked, "Just like when she was young."

After that, Mr. Evans wasn't himself for that whole year. Mrs. Evans and he had been quite close, and he missed her a great deal. He wasn't the same. All during that year, he wasn't too well, and we could see that.

In 1956, I came in on Tuesday after the Christmas holidays—that was the third of January. And he didn't look well. In the afternoon, I

said, "Mr. Evans, don't you think you ought to see a doctor?" He said no, he'd wait till he got home. That afternoon two people came to the office, but Mr. Evans, who was always a gentleman, did not get to his feet. I was sorry I mentioned it, I don't know what made me mention it. But when they went out, I said, "Mr. Evans, you weren't too cordial with them—you didn't get up when they came in." He didn't say much. Afterwards, he didn't look at all well. I suggested I go out and get a little supper. I got fruit and one or two other things, which he liked. So he went to his room to lie down a while, then came in and sat down and ate. He was talking about when he and Mrs. Evans went to the Philippines, when all of a sudden he stopped—like that. I looked up and said, "Mr. Evans, don't you feel well?" No response. And then his head drooped, and I caught him. I pulled him to me. And I pulled the chair over so I could get to the phone. I was afraid he would fall on the floor. I called Jack at the desk. I said, "Mr. Evans had a heart-attack. Will you send someone up quickly?" He said, "Miss Brown, do you want the oxygen?" I said yes, "Get a doctor!" So Jack, the desk clerk, came up immediately. He tried to get him on the couch. Then a nurse who lived on the floor came and undid his tie and took his shoes off. I had taken his teeth out. I guess it was right. The doctor came and Miss Heath came and said, "I think he is gone."

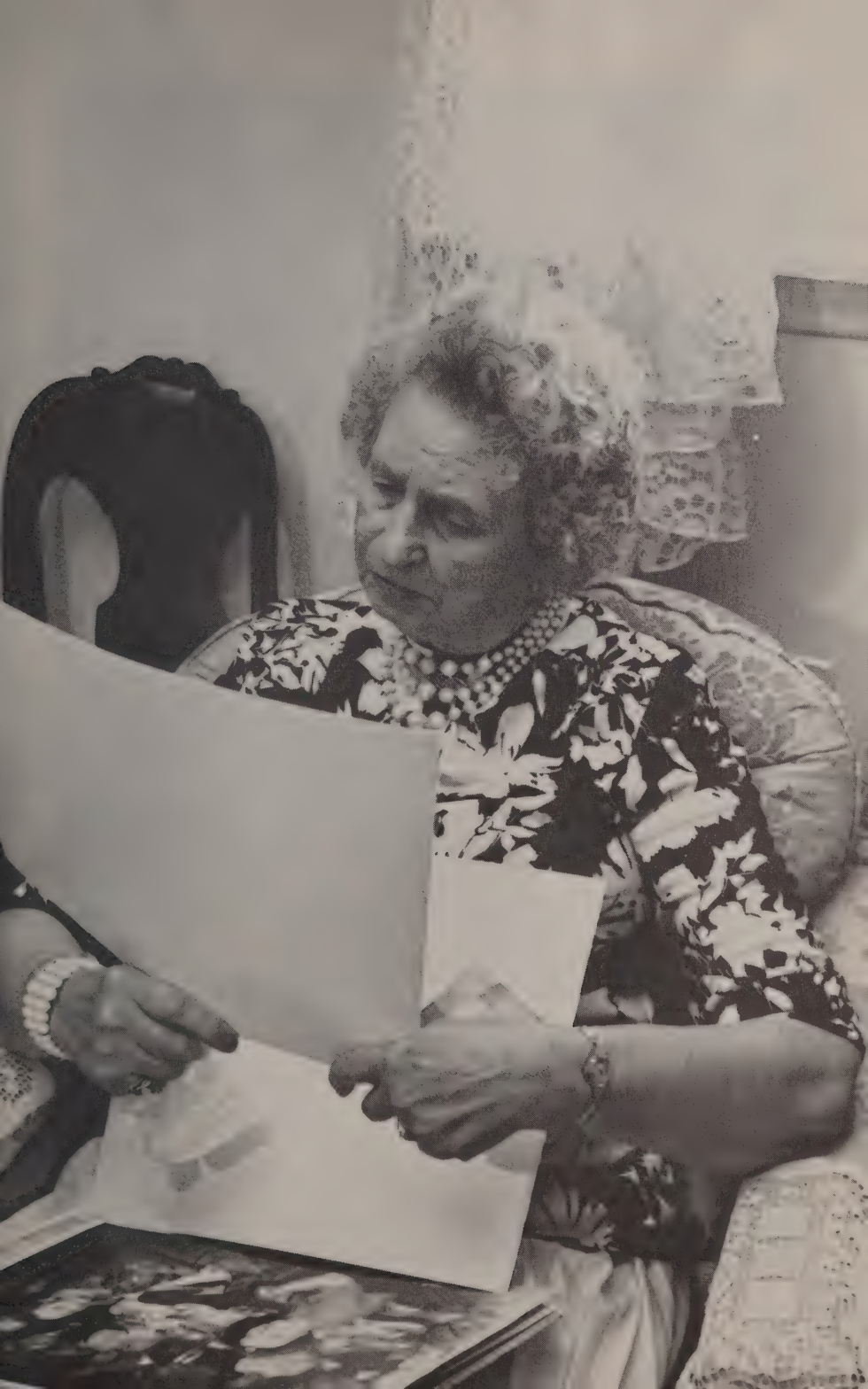
"Yes," I said, "I feel sure." There was no pulse, you see.

Then I had such trouble with the office. The doctor said to notify the police. They came and locked the office. I said, "You have no right to do that. I have as much right in the office as Mr. Evans because I'm a member of the board." "Oh," they said, "in that event."

I will tell you, that day, I will never know where the strength came from. By the end of it I was pretty well all in.

I made arrangements for the funeral, and after the service in the church a meeting was held there with the trustees who were present, Mr. Thompson and Dr. Hung and Mrs. Taylor, as to whether or not the Fellowship should go on and, if so, what to do. They all decided it should go on. And I said, "I'm willing to do what I can." Then at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Evans's niece, Ruth, my sister, and I accompanied the body on the train to Utica, N.Y. for another service the following day in Clinton, N.Y. where later on burial took place. And then we came back to New York. And it was pretty hard. I wasn't getting any salary. I wanted to do what I could, but I didn't believe I could handle it.

The Lord was with me. I completely surrendered myself to Him. I said, "I'm willing. Here I am." Since I had to have a salary, and my family didn't want me to go on with the work, which they thought was too hard, I prayed and prayed about it. Then the letters started pouring in, wanting the Fellowship to continue, and on top of all them there was a check from Mrs. Davison, a thousand dollars for the Fellowship and five hundred for me personally as an encouragement for me to continue. And there was another check from Mrs. Lilly. And others—



many others. So there was an indication that I should continue the work. Another indication was that, around this time, an aunt of mine died and left me a small legacy, which would permit me to continue. Otherwise, what could I have done? After we had cleaned out Mr. Evans's house, Mr. Maddock—who was on the board—said, "You're not going to try to continue, are you, Miss Brown?"

"Yes," I said, "after prayerful consideration I am going to continue."

"Well," he said, "do take care of yourself."

Then in August of that same year my father was taken very ill. He was a strong man who had never been really ill in his life. One morning he couldn't get out of bed. He was paralyzed. So Mother called the doctor and they took him to the hospital and found a tumor on the spine. They gave him a fifty-fifty chance. "He is suffering now," I said, "and it will get worse. So why not operate?" So they operated and he came through just fine. I went to see him every day even though I was keeping the office going. He wanted so much to go home. We were almost beside ourselves. He wanted to go home and sit under the maple tree. We wanted to please him. But the doctors said it wasn't possible. We tried to explain to him that he would have to wait until he got stronger. Then, late Sunday afternoon after the family had left, I saw that Papa wasn't good at all. I felt he wouldn't live through the night. Norma sat out in the waiting room. Norma couldn't take it. I could. We had nurses around the clock. Papa became cold, naturally—because his circulation was poor. I asked the nurse to get another blanket. You'd think a special nurse would know better. Then I stood by his bed practically two hours straight. The nurse wanted to relieve him when he got congested, but he wouldn't open his mouth. I said, "Papa, please open your mouth, the nurse wants to help you and you'll feel better afterwards." So he did. Then, later on, he said something to me and I asked him a second time, but I still couldn't make it out. I said, "Everything is all right. You'll be all right." So he held my hand and he would squeeze it once in a while. At half-past five in the morning Norma came in. She asked if Papa was worse. Well, he was about the same. She wondered if she should go on to school (*Note: Miss Norma Brown was a schoolteacher.*) I didn't think so. I hated to see her go. Then, at six o'clock, while I had a hold of him, Papa passed away. I said to the nurse, "I'm afraid he's gone." Sometimes I wondered if we did right. We did all we could.

FIP: 1956 was a trying year for you.

Miss Brown: Yes, it was. All the time I had to keep the Fellowship going. I agreed to be acting Executive Secretary for one year until the board could find someone else to carry on. A few men were interested in the job, including two ministers. But Mr. Evans had always said,



"Never get a minister to lead the Fellowship. At some time, in some way, they are apt to become biased."

The board finally said, "We think Kathryn Brown's the one to carry on." I didn't think I was sufficiently qualified. I tried to talk my way out of it. I did not want the responsibility. Anything I touch I want to make a go of, I don't want it to be a failure. But they talked me into it and that's the way it went.

That year was a hard year. Anything that was hard or difficult that came up, I would say to myself, "Now, how would Mr. Evans handle it?" and I would pray about it and think about it and then I would go about it in his way.

Gradually I gained friends for the Fellowship—the ministers—the churches. We would go to the various churches on Sunday. I've been to at least twenty-five churches in New York City. Reverend Pierce, of Marble Collegiate Church—Dr. Peale's church on Fifth Avenue, of which I am a member—helped me a lot. He thought I was a wonderful person to undertake what I was doing. I had a few setbacks—accidents. I used to ask Mr. Evans why we had these setbacks. And he would say, "You are being tested for higher things, Miss Brown." Verall Wright, who was a trustee at the time, used to say, "Miss Brown is taken away to make us see what she is doing. Perhaps we do not appreciate the amount of work she was really doing." That was her explanation.

FIP: You were the first editor of the bi-monthly publication, weren't you Miss Brown?

Miss Brown: Yes, I did the editing with the help of Mrs. Alice Teel. She read it over for me. I would be so nervous about it—I was so afraid of errors. Miss Bertha Smith was the first editor we hired to do the bi-monthly. The second was Paul Hourihan, who walked in one day and, as he always said, it must have been that we had met in a previous life. He was a good editor, a good writer. He had good ideas. Then Neil Melblom came and then, when he decided to go to work for the Lutherans in Geneva, Switzerland, Paul Griffith came. That was in 1966.

FIP: Your ability to understand people seems to be one of the main things that kept the Fellowship going.

Miss Brown: Don't forget I have deep faith. If I believe in something, I will work toward the ultimate progress. I do not like to have anything to do with anything that is going to fail.

FIP: As I recall your saying, there were some volunteers who helped you in those days.

Miss Brown: Yes, there was Miss Flora Horton, who worked in the office four days a week for five years until her death, and Agnes Riddell, who came for two to do the filing and all the cross-reference work. I also had a couple of assistants who typed the letters I dictated.

Much of the hard letter-writing I did I would do in my apartment in the evening. There was not time in the office. It was hard for me at the beginning. It's so important how the recipient of a letter is going to feel. I still do a lot of it. Some of the people I write to I have been writing to for years—Velta Myrle Allen, Mildred Seydell, Emily Councilman, Dr. Hung, Lady Coote, Reuben Musey, and others, and the trustees, of course. The Fellowship was like one big family. If one of our members passed on, we would immediately write a letter. Or if they passed on in New York, we'd be right there and go to the funeral and offer help in whatever way we could. That's what the Fellowship is all about—helping others. You have no idea of the amount of work involved in the early days.

FIP: How would you sum up the years you spent with the Fellowship?

Miss Brown: A very satisfying and worthwhile life. With many sacrifices, of course. Many sacrifices. Mr. Evans said if the Fellowship could save one person, it would be worthwhile.

During my time and Mr. Evans's, we opened each morning with prayer. Not once was the office begun without a devotional period in the morning. We had a number of prayer circles in California and the Midwest and, later, in the South It always bothered me that I couldn't do more along the prayer aspect of the work. My time was so taken up with keeping everything else going. It bothered me no end.

You ask me now, and the fact is I don't know how it was all done. All I know is that the Lord gave me the strength and the know-how to go forward.

I regard myself as a living example of prayer. I've always said that. Why? Because, number one, the Fellowship is still here after many adversities, after all those years. And, number two, that I was brought through my open-heart surgery, which was touch and go.** I didn't have one feeling that I wouldn't be brought through. Never. I could tell you many experiences in my life with the Fellowship where I always had exactly the same feeling.

**During a consultation of physicians, including the head consultant of the hospital, the surgeon picked up a copy of our bimonthly publication I had been reading and said: "This is the kind of work Miss Brown does and we want to make it possible for her to carry on many more years."

Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, and color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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